



State Board of Education Frequently Asked Questions

Why is the Board selecting a new assessment?

Arizona Revised Statute §15-741 requires the Board to adopt and implement a test to measure pupil achievement. A new assessment aligned with the fully implemented standards must be selected for use in School Year 2014-2015.

How was the test selected?

On March 6, 2014, incorporating feedback from parents, educators, and business and community leaders, the Board adopted a statement of values that was used as the basis for the requirements of the Request for Proposals (RFP).

In June 2014, the RFP for the new statewide assessment was released, and responses were due in July 2014. As allowed by Arizona procurement law, an independent evaluation team was assembled to review vendor proposals, assess the extent to which proposals address the requirements listed in the RFP, and recommend contract award to vendor that best addressed the state's requirements. The evaluation team reviewed six proposals and unanimously narrowed the choice to four groups. These four groups were invited to submit best and final offers, which the evaluation team reviewed. The evaluation team unanimously recommended the private, not-for-profit American Institutes for Research (AIR) to Chief Procurement Officer Patty Clark and the State Board of Education, who have announced their selection of AIR.

How did the Board ensure that the RFP was written fairly and evaluated appropriately?

The Board utilized the services of The National Center for the Improvement of Educational Assessment, Inc. (The Center for Assessment) to ensure objectivity and overall thoroughness of the RFP before its release. The Chief Procurement Officer again utilized the service of the Center for Assessment to give feedback on the evaluation tool and ensure that all RFP requirements were appropriately included in the tool.

The Center for Assessment is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization founded in 1998 whose mission is to foster improved student achievement through enhanced policies and practices, educational assessment and accountability. To date the Center has had contracts with more than 30 states.

Why was the selection process a secret prior to the announcement of the award?

State law explicitly requires that the procurement process maintain strict security and confidentiality in order to ensure that each vendor is given fair and equal consideration.

Will contract and procurement documents be available to the public?

Soon after the contract is finalized, public documents related to AIR's contract will be electronically available through [ProcureAZ](#). All public documents related to the procurement are available for public inspection by making a [public records request](#) to the Arizona Department of Education.

**What experts were on the evaluation team?**

A seven member team of volunteer experts from the Arizona education community evaluated the RFP responses. The team members were employees of local schools or organizations, not employees of the State, and included:

- A charter school representative
- A superintendent
- A director of research and evaluation
- A special education director
- An assistant superintendent for academic services
- A chief information officer
- A community member

Who is the American Institutes for Research (AIR)?

AIR is a private, not-for-profit organization with 60 years of experience in aptitude and proficiency testing, including 37 years in K–12 educational assessments. AIR closely collaborates with knowledgeable test developers, local experts and teachers to develop standards-based, criterion-referenced tests. Over the years, AIR staff has worked on 40 plus state and national assessments, on international assessments, and on assessments in countries around the world.

AIR has successfully supported Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)-compliant state assessment projects across the country in paper-pencil and online formats. AIR has delivered or signed contracts to deliver assessments in Oregon, Delaware, Hawaii, Minnesota, Utah, Missouri, Florida, Ohio, California, Washington, West Virginia, Maine, South Dakota, Idaho, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. In spring 2014, AIR administered a consortium's multistate field tests to more than 4 million students in grades 3–8 and 11 in 21 states and jurisdictions.

Who will be responsible for overseeing AzMERIT?

State law requires the Board to adopt and implement a test to measure pupil achievement. AzMERIT - Arizona's Measurement of Educational Readiness to Inform Teaching – is controlled by Arizona and measures Arizona's standards.

How much does the new assessment cost?

Assuming half of Arizona students will take the computer-based test and half will take the paper-based test, the cost for the first year of Arizona's Measurement of Educational Readiness to Inform Teaching (AzMERIT) will be \$19 million. This estimate will be refined by the end of 2014, as schools determine if they are technologically prepared to give the computer-based exam. Costs are expected to decrease in future years as schools transition to computer-based exams.

How will the computer based test be accessible to students with special needs?

The new computer-based assessments provide innovative tools that provide accommodations for a wide array of students with special needs.

**How much time will students spend taking AzMERIT?**

Students will be tested in English Language Arts and Mathematics in grades 3 through 8, and at the end of six required high school courses – in 9th, 10th, and 11th grade English Language Arts / Literacy courses and in Algebra 1, Geometry, and Algebra 2. AzMERIT testing times are substantially similar to those required for the previous statewide assessment.

How is AzMERIT high school testing different from AIMS testing?

Students enrolled in high school level English Language Arts courses or Algebra 1, Geometry, and Algebra 2 or their equivalents will take the AzMERIT tests. This includes younger students enrolled in high school level courses. AzMERIT high school end-of-course exams will be given at the end of each of the designated courses to measure mastery of the standards taught in that course. Unlike AIMS, a passing score on these tests is not a requirement for high school graduation.

AIMS was given in the tenth grade year to measure only the minimal expectations of the students in their first two years of high school. High school students graduating after December 31, 2016 will no longer be required to pass the AIMS test to graduate high school.

Will schools be forced to give AzMERIT on computers?

The exams must measure a student's mastery of the standards, not their computer literacy. That's why local education agencies will decide if they are ready to give, and their students are ready to take, AzMERIT on a computer.

Will schools be able to easily administer the computer-based AzMERIT?

The platform used to deliver AzMERIT allows for easy school set-up, exceptional monitoring and security, and greater access through a wide variety of supported hardware.

What new information will AzMERIT provide?

AzMERIT will provide students, parents and educators with information about areas of academic strength and weakness, and will measure student achievement toward meeting the standards. The new exams also will provide meaningful multistate comparisons that will show how Arizona students compare to their peers around the country.

What opportunities will there be for community engagement?

Involvement of Arizona stakeholders was an important requirement. Arizonans will be responsible for all aspects of the creation, implementation, and continued development of AzMERIT, ensuring the test is aligned with Arizona values.

Will student information be safe?

Student data privacy is of utmost concern. The state requires the vendor to encrypt all personally identifiable information during transmission and in storage, and to comply with state and federal law such as, but not necessarily limited to, A.R.S. §§ 15-1041 through 15-1045; the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA); the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA); and the Federal Information Security Management Act (FISMA).



How will results from AzMERIT be used in student, teacher and school accountability measures?

State law requires the statewide assessment to be used in various mandated accountability measures. Meaningful accountability systems require time to publicly develop and adopt, and further time to locally implement changes in response to a new system.

At its December 2014 meeting, the Board will discuss the establishment of a safe harbor year for accountability measures. This action would effectively allow a hold harmless period while baseline data is collected on the new assessment and related policy changes are being discussed.

Over the next year, the Board will address policies related to the assessment, like A-F School Letter Grades, Teacher and Principal Evaluations, Move on When Reading, and the potential use of End-of-Course assessments in high school course grades.

Does AzMERIT require specific curriculum or textbooks?

Neither the State Board nor the Department has authority to adopt or mandate school curricula. Under A.R.S. §§15-721 and 15-722, local governing boards (both district and charter) retain *exclusive authority* to adopt curricula via public meetings, allowing for community input regarding what instructional materials are used in classrooms.